

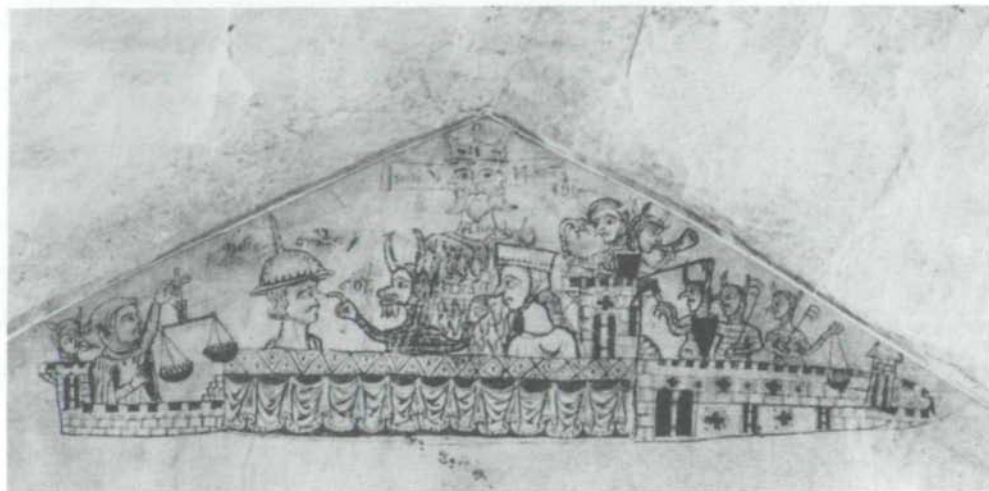
JEWS AND DEVILS: ANTI-SEMITIC STEREOTYPES OF LATE MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE ENGLAND

Frank Felsenstein

IN PICTORIAL representation, the earliest extant English caricature drawings of Jews stem from the thirteenth century. The best known, which may serve as our example, is the group caricature by an anonymous court scribe that appears at the head of a vellum Tallage Roll from the year 1233, now in the Public Record Office London.¹ Whatever may have been in the mind of the sketcher, we cannot be certain of the precise intention of his drawing, perhaps little more than a doodle in an idle hour, for the contents of the roll do not allude to it. The figure, however, at the centre of the sketch is identified as Isaac of Norwich, whose head surmounted by a crown has three faces, one full, the other two in profile, each of them protruding into a goatee beard. It has been suggested that a fourth face, behind the others, is to be understood, so that the crowned figure of Isaac is shown casting his eye over his possessions to the north, south, east and west.²

In his day, Isaac of Norwich (d. 1235), the son of Jurnet, was probably the wealthiest Jew in England and the drawing seems to allude both to the sphere of his influence and to his double dealing. For, some years earlier, Isaac is reported to have loaned huge sums of money to the abbot and monks of Westminster, despite the support they enjoyed of Pandulf, Bishop Elect of Norwich and former Papal Legate, a clergyman who had tried to have the Jews expelled from England.³ Also in the mind of the anonymous caricaturist may have been the tallaging of the Jewish community during the reign of Henry III, by which Jews were forced to pay considerable levies to the Crown. We know that Isaac owned taxable assets and land at Norwich, but in 1231 the King, in an unusual step, granted him freedom from being tallaged for the rest of his life, though the records show that even after this he was sufficiently rich to remain among the most heavily taxed.⁴

Below the three faces of Isaac is a complex tableau that has been described by Cecil Roth as 'the setting as it were of a contemporary miracle play', the drapery representing 'the stage, and the architecture ... that of the church



Caricature drawing on Exchequer of Receipt, Jews' Roll, no. 87, Hilary Term, 17 Hen. III (P.R.O. Doc. Reference E 401 (1565)). Reproduction by kind permission of the Public Record Office, London.

where such plays were generally performed'.⁵ Of course, the texts of those miracle plays that have survived are of a later date than the thirteenth century, though all too often the Jew characters portrayed in them were intended to be vilified and hissed at by the audience. The caricature shows Isaac surrounded by a number of figures, some of whom are Jews, the others recognizably devils or pagan gods. To the left and right of him are the named figures of a Jew and Jewess, Mosse Mokke and Avegaye (i.e. Abigail). The fierce horned devil, called Colbif, that stands between them has his index finger upon the pronounced nose of each, as if he were both identifying their ethnic origin and claiming them as his own. We know from other sources of Mosse Mokke's criminal background, that he was involved in an assault in Norwich in 1230 and that he was subsequently hanged for coin clipping in 1242,⁶ so that there is every likelihood that the artist intended to stress Isaac of Norwich's underworld connexions. The spiked hat that Mokke wears has been identified as the characteristic *pileum cornutum* worn by medieval Jews,⁷ though the spike may also be seen to link him to the horned figures of the cosmic underworld. (Isaac is similarly linked by his goatee beard, often used to associate Jews and the Devil).⁸ Avegaye wears the costume of a well-born Englishwoman, a wimple and a coif, and since her name appears immediately below the triple face of Isaac, it is possible that she is intended as his wife or mistress, dressed by him as a lady of fashion.⁹ Their intent, even libidinous, eyeing of each other and the quizzical posture of the horned *voyeur* in the turret (identified as Dagon) may suggest an illicit relationship between Avegaye and Mokke, a

union that has the sanction of the Devil. To the left of Mokke is another Jewish figure, who remains unidentified, holding up a pair of scales filled with coins, symbolizing the usurious role with which Jews were at once associated in the Middle Ages.

Even if the exact significance of the caricature as a whole remains obscure, the demonic figures to the right make it all too clear that the Jews are to be viewed as agents of hell, to be feared as well as to be vilified. With his crown, and standing as he does at the centre of the picture, Isaac may be seen to rule over this demonic world, and, by inference, perhaps also, through the power of his connexions, to usurp the role of the true King, of Henry III himself.¹⁰ The Jew is portrayed as both demon and traitor.

The caricature may be said to encapsulate in visual terms the prejudices and hostility of Christians in the England of the Middle Ages towards the Jews. The motifs that appear in the drawing recreate an image of Jewry that is far from savoury, in which Jews are presented at best as coin clippers and money lenders, in league with the Devil. But behind the portrayal is the larger, and far more sinister, stereotype of the medieval Jew as a bloody ritual murderer, the betrayer of Christ and a crucifier, one who is intent upon the very destruction of Christian society and Christian values. That stereotype, reinforced as it was from the pulpit, in pageants and in plays, engulfed and eventually submerged what Jews were *actually* like in favour of a diabolical travesty. Part of the problem for the present-day researcher concerned to trace the Jews of medieval England is how to distinguish between reality and stereotype, for so many early allusions to them are noteworthy only for the crudity of their anti-Semitism. They are expressive of an attitude, the prevailing Christian attitude towards the Jews, rather than describing the actual Jews of medieval England.

Those actual Jews—many of them settled in England from the time of William the Conqueror—were shortly to become victims of the prejudice against them, for, in 1290, by royal decree of Edward I, the whole Jewish population, numbering about sixteen thousand people, was summarily expelled from the country. For over three hundred and fifty years after that, with the exception of a few visitors and perhaps a handful of secret believers, there were no Jews in England until, following the delegation of Menasseh ben Israel (1604–1657), Oliver Cromwell finally acceded to their re-admission in 1655. But though the Jews themselves were expelled, the stereotype remained. There was no way of expelling that. On the contrary, in many ways, it was often expedient to nurture the stereotype if only as a means to imbue belief by Christians in the righteousness of their faith. As Trachtenberg puts it,

The mythical Jew, outlined by early Christian theology and ultimately puffed out to impossible proportions, supplanted the real Jew in the medieval mind,

until that real Jew to all intents and purposes ceased to exist. The only Jew whom the medieval Christian recognized was a figment of the imagination.¹¹

On the European continent, allusions to Jews in the late Middle Ages are with few exceptions stereotypical and hostile, showing a blind ignorance (or lack of comprehension) of the actualities of Jewish life and faith. In England, the hostility is no less apparent, though after 1290, there were no real Jews who could be compared with the stereotype. As a result, the stereotype remains practically the only yardstick by which English attitudes to the Jews may be gauged. And, for the English of the late Middle Ages, that stereotype, grotesque as it is, had become the 'real' Jew, since for them no other existed.

If we examine the facets of the stereotype in England as it appears in literary and dramatic representation, it soon becomes evident that Jews could be accused of every conceivable crime and found guilty without regard. After all, unlike on the Continent, in the absence of Jews from England, there could be no real harm in introducing them from the pulpit in demonic terms. There could be no question of revenge being meted out upon the Jews after the church service. Any ensuing violence could only be in the minds of the congregants.

At the root of the Christian stereotype of the Jew is the accusation that it was he who was responsible, as much as his forefathers, for the betrayal and crucifixion of Christ. The blame for the crucifixion is to be carried by every generation of Jews. Instead of being God's chosen people, the Jews have become, through the death of Christ, eternally accursed. The prevalent attitude here may be illustrated by quoting from William Langland's *Piers Plowman* (c. 1362), a work that has sometimes been praised for entertaining a sympathetic view of the Jews.¹² In describing how they encouraged the stabbing of Christ's body upon the cross, Langland execrates the Jews as follows:

For this foule vileynye vengeaunce to yow falle! ...
 For be this derknesse ydo, Death worth yvenqisshed;
 And ye, lurdaynes, han lost—for life shal have the maistrye.
 And youre fraunchyse, that fre was, fallen is in thraldom,
 And ye, cherles, and youre children, cheve shulle ye nevere,
 Ne have lordshipe in londe, no no lond tilye,
 But al barayne be and usurie usen,
 Which is lif that Oure Lord in alle lawes acurseth¹³

The scourge that is upon the Jews following the Crucifixion is compounded by Judas's betrayal of Christ at the Last Supper. By extension, all Jews must be feared for their treachery. Medieval tales and ballads often depict Jews who, in their cunning, deliberately impose upon or trick their

Christian neighbours. Similar tales are no less common in which the treacherous Jew is himself out-tricked. The most famous of these occurs in the *Cursor Mundi* of the fourteenth century containing what appears to be the first rendering in English of the 'pound of flesh' tale, which Shakespeare borrowed from a later version as one of the narrative sources of *The Merchant of Venice*. It is interesting that in the earliest examples of the 'pound of flesh' tale (which is of continental origin) neither party in the bond is Jewish, though, in England, once the connexion with Judaism was made there was no other way in which this popular story was told.¹⁴

In dramatic representation, the Judas-figure is made recognizable—and for the audience recognizably Jewish—by the red beard he wears, which can be traced back at least to the thirteenth century. According to Glassman, from the beginning the figure was associated with usury, for in 'the summer festival of Corpus Christi, founded by Pope Urban IV in 1264, ... Judas was portrayed by a person wearing a red beard who was bent beneath the weight of his money bags.'¹⁵ Cardozo notes that red 'is the colour of the soldiers of Antichrist, out of whom legend made the Red Jews' though he also cautions us that red 'is in no sense typical of Jewish physique.'¹⁶ Be that as it may, the red hair, deemed characteristic of Judas, was transferred in the drama to any villainous Jew figure. Most notably, Shylock from the time of Richard Burbage (who is thought to have first acted the part) to the early nineteenth century was invariably portrayed wearing a red beard.¹⁷ That the significance of the colour was well known in Elizabethan times is evident from a reference in Thomas Kyd's play, *The Spanish Tragedy*, 'and let their beards be of Judas his own colour'.¹⁸ Even after the Restoration, following the period of closure of the theatres, the tradition remained alive, for Dryden alludes to it in *Amboyme* (1673), 'There's treachery in that Judas-coloured beard.'¹⁹ Throughout, the Judas figure is associated with Jews as much as with treachery. 'Who sels Religion', the seventeenth-century cleric and poet Henry Vaughan affirms, 'is a *Judas Jew*.'²⁰ In popular culture, the equation through similarity of name of Jew and Judas marks out the Jew as one who both betrayed and killed Christ.

The deicidal image of the Jew in the England of the Middle Ages was reinforced by the further accusation that during Passover Jews were possessed by the fiendish desire to re-enact the Crucifixion and satisfied this frenzy by desecrating the consecrated Host until it bled²¹ and sometimes by murdering young Christian children. By a strange kind of synthesis, Abraham with his knife offering the child Isaac as sacrifice became, in the medieval mind, the same Jew who had killed Christ. (Another explanation of this blood-libel charge is that it derived from Crusading tales of the ruthlessness of the Saracens, who were said to use Christian blood in their demoniacal rituals. It was not difficult, on their return to Europe, for the

Crusaders to transfer the imputation to the Jews and use it as an excuse to wreak vengeance upon them).²² Ballads and tales abound describing the alleged fate of little Hugh of Lincoln who, it was claimed, had been put to death by ritual torture after having entered a Jew's house to play.²³ On that occasion, in 1255, despite a lack of evidence, the houses in the Jewish quarter of Lincoln were attacked and their occupants put to the sword or later hanged.

Even after the expulsion, the blood accusation remained the perfect means to incite mob hatred against absent Jews. As late as 1656, at about the time that Menasseh ben Israel was suing Oliver Cromwell, a pamphleteer writing to prevent their re-admission into England reminded his readers that the Jews 'make it their annual practice to crucifie children' and that there is no safeguard against such people once again 'imbruing their hands in the blood of yong [sic] and tender infants (crucifying them in scorn and derision of our profession)'.²⁴ And, in the same year, the notorious Puritan pamphleteer, William Prynne, quite brazenly asserts that 'the Jews almost every year crucify one child, to the injury and contumely of Jesus'.²⁵ So deeply engrained seems to have been the belief in the blood libel that in his petition to Cromwell to re-admit the Jews, Menasseh himself found it necessary to include his own firm refutation and defence. The killing by Jews of the young children of Christians, he avers,

is but a meer slander, seeing it is known that at this day, out of Jerusalem, no sacrifice nor blood is in any use by them [i.e. the Jews], even that blood which is found in an Egg is forbidden them, how much more mans blood?²⁶

Menasseh's plea, sufficient as it was to persuade Cromwell, appears to have had little effect in wiping away the blood libel from the collective consciousness of the Christian majority in England.

If the stereotype portrayed Jews in all their heinousness as ritual murderers and crucifiers, it was but a short step to link them with the Devil and Anti-Christ. After all, it was possible to find gospel evidence of the satanic involvement of the Jews. 'You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your fathers ye will do', Jesus berates the Jews (*John*, 8.44). As children of the Devil, the Jews seem to have been considered often as less than human, akin more to brute beast than mankind. Shakespeare's Shylock, for instance, is described as a 'cut-throat dog' (I.iii.106), 'A creature that did bear the shape of man' (III.ii.274) and later as one whose 'desires/Are wolvis, bloody, starv'd and ravenous' (IV.i.137–8). Another contemporary author speaks in a typical vein when he lists in procession 'Doggs, Turkes, Jewes, brute beasts, or filthy villaines'.²⁷ Again, in *A Brief Compendium of the Vain Hopes of the Jews Messiahs*, published in London in 1652, within a few years of the re-admission, the pseudonymous author, Eleazar Bargishai, describes how Elias

the prophet 'shall become an Hunter, which shall gather through the voice of his Horn, all the Doggs (that is to say) the Jews of the whole world together ...' (p. 11). A seventeenth-century proverb, concerned with the Jews' stiff-necked refusal of Christ, juxtaposes 'five things' that 'exceed in stubbornness and pertinaciousnesse, the Dogge among Beasts, the Cock among birds, the Goat among Cattle, the Prickthorn among plants, and the Jew among men'.²⁸ It is interesting that two of these 'five things' have associations with the Devil, a further two with the betrayal and crucifixion of Christ, but, in the Christian mind, the fifth—the Jew—is associated with both.²⁹ If only by implication, the Jew-figure is debased to a level beneath even the bestial.

The typical occupation of such a figure, the lending of money at interest, is also to be seen as the work of the Devil and in contradiction to the Scriptures. In the Gospel according to Saint Luke, Christians are enjoined to 'Lend, hoping for nothing again' (6.35; '*Mutuum date, nihil inde sperantes*', Vulgate Version). In response to this, the medieval Church forbade, at pain of excommunication, the taking of interest by Christian usurers. Being outside the jurisdiction of canonical law and, in any case prevented from pursuing those trades monopolized by the Christian craft guilds, Jews in many countries of Europe turned to usury or money-lending as the one profession that gave them legitimized status, however, dubious. In the popular imagination, Judaism and money-lending became synonymous: in England, on the medieval and the Elizabethan stage, a Jew figure was nearly always a usurer. The scorn and jeering derision that his appearance produced may be linked to the earlier equation of Jews and Judas, for it was remembered that the latter had betrayed Jesus to the priests for thirty pieces of silver (*Matt.*, 26.15). Like Judas, the Jewish money-lender was depicted on stage and elsewhere as completely unscrupulous and totally untrustworthy, a fiend-like agent who would sell his very soul for financial gain: '... all they that live of usury', Bishop Latimer tells us, 'they have their gains by the devil'.³⁰ Francis Bacon, writing in mitigation of the practice in his essay 'Of Usury' (1625), cites the many 'witty invectives' that both castigate usury as the work of the Devil and enjoin 'that usurers should have orange-tawny bonnets, because they do Judaize'.³¹ At the time of the re-admission, Menasseh was once again impelled to argue against similar embedded prejudice by pointing out that 'such dealing' in usury 'is not the essential property of the Iewes', and that Jewish law insists that 'it is a greater sinne to rob or defraud a stranger, than if I did it to one of my own profession: because a Iew is bound to shew his charity to all men ...'. 'If notwithstanding', adds Menasseh, 'there be some that do contrary to this, they do it not as Iewes simply, but as wicked Iewes, as amongst all Nations there are found generally some Usurers'.³²

As well as finding himself obliged to defend his co-religionists against the charges of usury and blood libel, Menasseh refers to a third prejudice or false report in currency against the Jews, whereby it was feared that, should they be re-admitted, they would set about inducing Christians to convert to Judaism. Again, Menasseh is adamant in contradicting this by categorically insisting that 'the Lewes do not entice any man to professe their Law'.³³ Nevertheless, the deeply rooted fear of the stereotyped Jew-figure, the threat that he posed to Christianity and his supposed cosmic connexion with the Devil gave credibility to claims even more bizarre. One such story that circulated widely at that time was that, as the price of their re-admission (for even that seems to have commanded a price!), the Jews had offered to purchase St. Paul's Cathedral in order to make it into their synagogue and 'The Bodleian Library at Oxford, to begin their Traffick with'.³⁴ The eighteenth-century Oxford historian, D'Blossiers Tovey, recounts with wry cynicism the discomfort of the English clergymen shortly before the re-admission in considering the possible fate that awaited them: '... the *Fanatical Preachers* at that Time', writes Tovey,

having so much Cunning as to perceive that if the Jewish Religion shou'd by a *Tolleration* at first, become *afterwards* the *Establish'd Religion*, they cou'd never expect to become *Rulers of Synagogues*, and be call'd *Rabbi*, without submitting to a *Circumcision*, which would be very painful to the *Flesh of Adult Persons*, and perhaps endanger their beloved lives ...³⁵

If the extreme unlikelihood of such insinuations makes them more comic than serious, the elements of fear and threat associated with them signify the extent to which the Jew-figure remained, in the popular imagination, an outcast or bogey-man even 350 years after the expulsion of 1290.

There are indeed lesser aspects of the stereotype that I have been unable to touch on, as for instance, (i) the belief that, as punishment for their crime against Jesus, Jews emitted a peculiarly foul smell that would instantly transform to a savour sweeter than ambrosia upon conversion by baptism (Sir Thomas Browne furnishes his *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* [1646] with a circumstantial chapter endeavouring most earnestly in their defence to disprove 'received opinion' that the 'Jews stinck naturally');³⁶ (ii) the apparent addiction of Jews to swearing and foul language (perhaps derived from *Matt.*, 26.74, describing the cursing and swearing of Peter in denying Christ), which seems to have been considered indicative of their cursed state;³⁷ (iii) the imputation that menstruation by both men and women and haemorrhoidal bleeding was normal among Jews, and was to be considered 'a very literal interpretation of the concept of guilt and corporate responsibility supposedly advanced in *Matthew* 27.25: "His blood be on us, and on

our children''';³⁸ (iv) the charge that in their extreme lasciviousness Jews 'seduced Christian girls, buggered Christian boys, and perpetrated profane orgies in parody of Christian ritual'.³⁹

All these aspects of the stereotype combined to portray a pariah, to be both hated and feared, who, with the mark of Cain upon him, was to be seen as the perpetual outsider, an analogue to the figure of the Wandering Jew. It has been claimed that the Wandering Jew, eternally seeking expiation for his supposed crime against Christ, derives from the late Middle Ages when mass expulsions of Jews took place throughout western Europe.⁴⁰ Again, however, it was not difficult to find scriptural support to justify the widespread belief that Jews were impelled to wander. 'And among these Nations', says Moses to the Jews in *Deuteronomy*, 28.65. 'thou shalt find no Ease, neither shall the Sole of thy Foot have rest ...'. At different times, in many places on the European Continent, Jews were refused the right of settlement and became, in the German term, *betteljuden*, the word 'bettel' having the double meaning of 'mendicancy' and 'trash'. In England, a writer like William Prynne picks up both meanings when he says of the Jews that they are 'disposed like so many Vagabonds over the face of the whole Earth, as the off-scowring of the world'.⁴¹ As a punishment for his deicidal deeds and for his refusal to acknowledge Christ through accepting conversion, the Jew will never be permitted to rest but must wander the world to be execrated as a living symbol of his crime against mankind.

The anti-Semitic stereotype outlined here is not always made up of every one of the features that I have described. Frequently, however, semiological allusion to a single feature will be sufficient to invoke the larger stereotype without the necessity of cataloguing all its connexions. The associations that the Jew-figure evokes make him instantly recognizable and immediately abhorrent. It is difficult—indeed, perhaps impossible—to trace specific sources for each aspect of the stereotype. What is apparent, though, is that two things in particular seem to have given sustenance to the apparent 'truth' of the stereotype, even at such moments when, by any rational consideration, the existence of such a diabolical figure could only be considered as preposterous.

The first of these is the perversely literalistic interpretation of the Holy Scriptures, whereby clergymen and controversialists could make charges against the Jews and offer irrefutable typological evidence for their arguments by claiming the support of the word of God. As we have seen, scriptural 'proof' could be uncovered for many facets of the stereotype, and biblical text was not infrequently used to determine Christian attitudes towards contemporary Jews. So, an anonymous pamphleteer writing about fifteen years before the re-admission into England of the Jews speaks of them as the descendants 'of the most viperous generation ... that ever were as

Christ chargeth them ...' [Matt., 12.34; 23.33].⁴² And the author of the sermon, *The Devilish Conspiracy, Hellish Treason, Heathenish Condemnation, and Damnable Murder, Committed, and Executed by the Iewes, against the Anointed of the Lord, Christ the King*, London, 1648, switches from past to present tense, thereby implicating all Jews, in his endeavour, through apt biblical quotation

to be rightly informed what the reall true causes were, which moved these accursed Jewes to so horrid an act as to kil Ch[rist]: the King: And the generall leading cause is one word, that they are *Hypocrites, a Generation of Vipers, Sonnes of Belial, Children (indeed) of the Devill*: for so Ch[rist]: told them ...⁴³.

It is important to realize, in reviewing the stereotype as we have, that it is essentially a Christian invention or myth, and that as such it actually tells us far more about Christianity and Christian attitudes in late medieval and Renaissance England than it can reveal about real Jews. Equally, we should not forget that a very different though also literalistic interpretation of biblical text by Christian scholars could lead—as it did in seventeenth-century England—to the strong philo-Semitic movement that greatly aided the re-admission of the Jews. By a curious paradox, the diabolical stereotype and the view of the Jews as God's chosen people were to exist side by side in the England of the later Renaissance.⁴⁴ Indeed, it has been claimed that they remain that way even to the present day.⁴⁵

A second and related source for the endurance of the stereotype is the nearly complete ignorance or misunderstanding of Jewish ritual by which, for instance, the almost simultaneously celebrated festivals of Passover and Easter could be viewed as mutually antagonistic. That the Jews practised religious ceremonies that were not those of Christianity already served to make them different, and from there it was but a short step to cast Jewish ritual in a diabolized mould. Such a practice as circumcision, physically a source of fear, could be employed as a further means to distinguish between Christian purity and Jewish immorality. From biblical text, both of the Old and New Testaments, it is evident that the act of circumcision should be viewed as one of spiritual cleansing. In *Genesis* (17.6–14), it is described as 'a token of the covenant' between God and the seed of Abraham, though St. Paul argues in his epistle to his proselytes in Rome that the physical cutting of the prepuce may be deemed purposeless if it is not coupled with a similar spiritual purification. Writes Paul:

... circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.

Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision?⁴⁶

Paul's argument here, by which he intends to offer salvation through Christ to a wider circle of new believers, becomes all too easily the means by which later commentators could berate the Jews. So, for example, the martyrologist John Foxe, in a sermon preached upon the conversion of a Jew in 1578, execrating the Jews for their 'heynous abominations, insatiable butcheries, treasons, frensies, and madnes', accuses them of vaunting 'your selues lustily in speach of the circumcision of your foreskinnes, and your uncircumcised hearts ouerflowe with spyderlike poyson'.⁴⁷ By extension, the act of circumcision becomes in another writer of the mid-seventeenth century the focal point of the Passover ritual whereby

When they were in *England* ... the Jews used every year to steal a young Boy (the child of a Christian) and to circumcise him, and then in their Synagogue sate in a solemn Assembly, chusing one of themselves to be *Pilat*, who out of their Devillish malice to Christ and Christians condemned the child, and crucified him to death; and this was discovered at *Norwich*, where they circumcised a Christian child ..., and condemned him to be crucified ...⁴⁸

The supposed use of circumcision as part of a larger diabolical ritual, still being practised, is impressed by populist Christian thinking about the Jews, despite the attempts of a few more enlightened writers to dispel the myth.⁴⁹

The consecrating or purifying role of circumcision in Judaism has its counterpart in Christianity in the act of baptism by holy water. The similarity of purpose of the two rites may be behind a further charge against the Jews that they deliberately set about to poison well water as a means of wreaking damage and desecration upon Christendom. During the Black Death (c. 1348/9), the cause of which was attributed to well poisoning by the Jews, dreadful pogroms were a common occurrence across Europe,⁵⁰ and the charge of poisoning by Jews became a recurrent one, despite the fact that outbreaks of plague made no distinction in also selecting the alleged perpetrators as victims. The boast by Barabas, the eponymous villain of Marlowe's play, *The Jew of Malta* (c. 1591), that 'Sometimes I go about and poison wells' is indicative that the charge was known and repeated even in England.⁵¹

By extension, Jews were thought to use poison as a means to further their treachery against the state. The imputation was even given some credence when the Portuguese, Roderigo Lopez, a converted Jew and physician to Queen Elizabeth, was found guilty in 1594 of attempting to poison her, though the more common assumption was that he was the paid agent of the King of Spain and of the Catholic Church. Lopez's treachery, according to an early seventeenth-century broadsheet, was 'Hatcht by the Pope, the Devil, and a Jew'.⁵² '*This practice of poysoning*', says William Carleton

writing of Lopez, was 'reckoned among the sinnes of the Anti-christian Synagogue, and taught for Doctrine by the Romish Rabbies.'⁵³ The prosecuting counsel at his trial described the 'vile Jew' Lopez in terms that leave him indistinguishable from the Jew stereotype, 'a perjured and murdering traitor and Jewish doctor, worse than Judas himself.'⁵⁴

The rituals of Judaism were viewed by many as having the express aim of subverting the English Church. At best, such ritual is seen as an admonition to Christians, a reminder that 'the egregious Sin, of an ingrateful, disobedient, and obstinate mind, with which the nation of the Jewes hath been in all ages branded ... is worth our remembrance, and serious meditation'.⁵⁵ More commonly, as the Elizabethan divine, Thomas Cartwright, has it, their 'Ceremoniall Law' is to be seen as 'a Law of Enmity', a perpetual hindrance to 'the Gentiles from joyning themselves unto the Jews'.⁵⁶ Both the interpretation of biblical text and the persistence of popular belief on the nature of their rituals cast the Jews as enemies of Christ, outsiders and devils. As we have seen, the stereotype flourished in the virtual absence of Jews from England. It was the unavoidable and unsought inheritance of those Jews who came to England following the re-admission of 1655.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Exchequer of Receipt, Jews' Roll, no. 87, Hilary Term, 17 Hen. III.
- ² Luke Owen Pike, *History of Crime in England*, 2 vols. (London, 1873, 1876), vol. I, p. 190.
- ³ Bohun Lynch, *A History of Caricature* (London, 1926), pp. 20–21.
- ⁴ V. D. Lipman, *The Jews of Medieval Norwich* (London, JHSE, 1967), p. 105.
- ⁵ Cecil Roth, 'Portraits and Caricatures of Medieval English Jews' in *Essays and Portraits in Anglo-Jewish History* (Philadelphia, 1962), pp. 22–3.
- ⁶ Michael Adler, *Jews of Medieval England* (London, 1931), p. 20n.
- ⁷ Roth, op. cit., p. 23. See also, Ruth Melnikoff, 'Cain and the Jews', *Journal of Jewish Art*, vol. 6 (Jerusalem, 1979) 16–38.
- ⁸ See Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews*, second edition (Philadelphia, 1980), pp. 46–7. M. D. Anderson, *A Saint at Stake: The Strange Death of William of Norwich 1144* (1964), p. 55, proposes that the drawing represents 'Isaac ... in Hell ... shown in the centre as the King of Demons, crowned and with a triple face. ... The triple face, originally applied to pagan gods, became an ambiguous element in medieval iconography, being applied both to the Holy Trinity and to the Infernal Rulers. The drawing suggests another possible interpretation of a fifteenth-century misericord in Cartmel Priory (Lancs.) which represents a triple-faced King with markedly Semitic features ...'.
- ⁹ Roth, op. cit., p. 23, suggests that Ave-gaye and Mokke are possibly husband and wife. Adler, op. cit., p. 20, considers the two to be Isaac's 'local agents'.
- ¹⁰ Alfred Rubens, *A History of Jewish Costume* (New York, 1973), p. 94, identifies Isaac's crown as that of the King: 'It has three fleur-de-lys on it like the crown on the first Great Seal of Henry III.' He considers that Isaac wears the crown 'possibly to indicate that he is the king's property.' Guido Schoenberger, *The Drawings of Mathis Gothart Niethart called Gruenewald* (New York, 1948), no. 35, p. 44, reproduces Gruenewald's 'The Three Heads' (c. 1520–5) and avers that 'in the *Bible Moralisee*, and its derivations from

- the 13th to the 15th century, Satan usually appears three-headed with a radiant crown ... having the special significance of Anti-christ.' cf. Bodleian MS 2706, *Bible Moralisée*, French thirteenth century, fol. 198.
- ¹¹ Trachtenberg, op. cit., p. 216.
- ¹² See H. Michelson, *The Jew in Early English Literature* (Amsterdam, 1926), p. 41.
- ¹³ William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, ed. A. C. Schmidt (1978), pp. 222–3 (B text, passus XVIII, ll. 94, 101–7). [Iurdaynes = villains; cheve = prosper].
- ¹⁴ See Michelson, op. cit., pp. 46–8, 51–2; Jacob Lopes Cardozo, *The Contemporary Jew in the Elizabethan Drama* (Paris, 1925), pp. 254–66. Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. I (London and New York, 1957), pp. 452–4, 486–90, records a variant or analogue to the story in Anthony Munday's *Zelauto or The Fountaine of Fame* (1580), in which the 'extorting Usurer' is a Christian rather than a Jew and the bond stipulates the loss (not of a pound of flesh but) of the right eyes of his two intended victims.
- ¹⁵ Bernard Glasman, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes without Jews* (Detroit, 1975), p. 19.
- ¹⁶ Cardozo, op. cit., p. 60 and note.
- ¹⁷ But see Ruth Mellinkoff, 'Judas's Red Hair and the Jews', *Journal of Jewish Art*, vol. 9 (1982) 31–42, who concludes that it is 'both possible and even probable that Judas and Shylock wore red wigs on the stage, but to date I have not found firm evidence' (p. 45).
- ¹⁸ Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*, ed. J. R. Mulryne (London, 1970), p. 135. The reference occurs in an additional passage (first printed in 1602) and considered to be any another writer.
- ¹⁹ John Dryden, *Amboyne*, l.i.
- ²⁰ Vaughan, *Silex Scintillans* ('Rules and Lessons', l. 45), *The Works of Henry Vaughan*, ed. L. C. Martin (Oxford, 1957), p. 437; cf. George Herbert, 'Self-condemnation', ll. 17–18.
- ²¹ For an early fifteenth-century pictorial representation of this, see Henry John Cheales, 'On the Wall-paintings in All Saints' Church, Friskney, Lincolnshire', *Archaeologia*, vol. 53, pt. II, 1893, 427–32.
- ²² The suggestion is made by Cardozo, op. cit., p. 22.
- ²³ Montagu Frank Modder, *The Jew in the Literature of England* (Philadelphia, 1939), pp. 12–13.
- ²⁴ W. H., *Anglo-Judaëus, or the History of the Jews whilst here in England* (1656), pp. 46, 48.
- ²⁵ William Prynne, *A Short Demurrer to the Jewes Long Discontinued Remitter into England* (1656), p. 27.
- ²⁶ *Pamphlets Relating to the Jews in England during the 17th and 18th Centuries*, ed. P. Radin (San Francisco, 1939), pp. 21–2 (To His Highnesse the Lord Protector of the Commonwealth. The Humble Addresses of Menasseh ben Israel [1655?]).
- ²⁷ P. Fairlambe, *The Recantation of a Brownist* (1606); quoted by David S. Katz, *Phil-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England 1603–1655* (Oxford, 1982), p. 163.
- ²⁸ Thomas Calvert, *The Blessed Jew of Marocco or a Blackmoor Made White* (York, 1649); quoted by Glassman, op. cit., pp. 93–4.
- ²⁹ The dog (cf. Cerberus) and the goat are both associated with the Devil (see Trachtenberg, op. cit., pp. 46–7, 84); the cock is linked with Peter's denial of Christ (Matt., 26.34; 27.74) and the prickthorn with the crucifixion (the crown of thorns).
- ³⁰ Latimer, *Remains*, ii, p. 42 (quoted Michelson, op. cit., p. 138).
- ³¹ *The Essays or Counsells Civil and Moral of Francis Lord Verulam*, ed. Henry Lewis (Collins' English Classics, n.d.), p. 237. Lewis notes that 'in the Middle Ages it was customary to enforce by law certain styles of dress upon the different ranks and professions of society, and it was not uncommon to compel Jews to wear head-dresses of yellow.'
- ³² *Pamphlets Relating to the Jews in England*, op. cit., pp. 20–1. cf. John Blaxton, *The English Usurer, or Usury Condemned* (London, 1634), p. 50, who remarks that a Christian usurer 'is worse than a Jew, for one Jew will not take vsury of another: but the Vsurer will take vsury of his Christian brethren.'
- ³³ *Pamphlets Relating to the Jews in England*, op. cit., p. 22.

- ³⁴ See A. Cohen, *An Anglo-Jewish Scrapbook, 1640–1840* (1943), p. 215, and D'Blossiers Tovey, *Anglia Judaica* (Oxford, 1738), pp. 259–60.
- ³⁵ See Tovey, *ibid.*, p. 267.
- ³⁶ See Tovey, *ibid.*, p. 106; Katz, *op. cit.*, pp. 4, 17; Trachtenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 48; Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, Bk. IV, ch. X.
- ³⁷ See Michelson, *op. cit.*, p. 107.
- ³⁸ Venetia Newell, 'The Jew as Witch Figure', *The Witch Figure*, ed. Venetia Newell (1973), p. 114.
- ³⁹ Allen Edwardes, *Erotica Judaica* (New York, 1967), p. 197. Edwardes also remarks, p. 172, that the ecclesiastical mind regarded intercourse with a Jew as equivalent to bestiality, for which biblical prescription states that 'if a Man lyeth with a Beaste, he shall be put to Death; and ye shall kill the Beaste also.' (*Leviticus*, 20.15).
- ⁴⁰ Newell, *op. cit.*, p. 98.
- ⁴¹ Prynne, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
- ⁴² *The Land of Promise, and the Covenant Thereof* (London, 1641), p. 37. *Matt.*, 12.34 speaks of the 'generation of vipers' and the phrase is repeated at 23.33: 'Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can you escape the damnation of hell?'
- ⁴³ *op. cit.*, p. 21.
- ⁴⁴ The development of English philo-Semitism has been admirably documented by David Katz, *op. cit.*
- ⁴⁵ See Harold Fisch, *The Dual Image: A Study of the Figure of the Jew in English Literature* (1959), p. 11.
- ⁴⁶ *Rom.*, 2.25–6.
- ⁴⁷ *A Sermon Preached at the Christening of a Certain Jew at London*, translated out of Latine into English by James Bell, London, 1578, Eiii^r and Eiv^r.
- ⁴⁸ *The Case of the Jevves stated: or the Jews Synagogue Opened* (London, 1656), p. 1.
- ⁴⁹ See, for instance, Joseph Copley, *The Case of the Jews is Altered, and their Synagogue Shut to all Evil-Walkers, or a Vindication of the Jewes* (London, 1656).
- ⁵⁰ See Trachtenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 102.
- ⁵¹ Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*, II.iii.
- ⁵² *Popish Plots and Treasons, from the beginning of the reign of Queen Elizabeth. Illustrated with Emblems and explain'd in Verse*, quoted by Sidney Lee, 'Elizabethan England and the Jews', *Transactions of the New Shakespeare Society* (1887–92) 162.
- ⁵³ Carleton, *A Thankful Remembrance of God's Mercie* (London, 1624), p. 164.
- ⁵⁴ Lee, *op. cit.*, p. 160. Among others, Trachtenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 93, points out that the renown of the Jews in medicine often had a consequent effect of linking them with sorcery and the black arts.
- ⁵⁵ A. R. [Alexander Ross], *A View of the Jewish Religion* (London, 1656), [*2].
- ⁵⁶ *Helpes for Discovery of the Truth in Point of Toleration* (London, 1648), p. 2.